

Public Hearing Testimony
Appropriations Committee
February 20, 2013
Rosetta E. Jones, Board of Trustees
Garde Performing Arts Center, New London Connecticut

Re: Directed Local Funds for Garde Arts Center - 2014-15 Biennial Budget

Good Evening Appropriate Committee Members, My name is Rosetta Jones, I have volunteer at the Garde Art Center for approximately ten years, and currently serve on the Board of Trustees. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Board of Directors, Staff, Volunteers, Families, and Youth of Southeastern Connecticut's Community. I would like to express our gratitude for your support of the \$285,000 grant during this biennial budget; and respectfully ask your continued level of funding for the 2014-2015.

Your state level support has enabled the Garde Arts Center to provide a broad spectrum of regional Hi-quality performing arts, film events, and educational opportunities that engage, enrich, entertain, and inspire the greater New London County Region.

As New London County, like many neighboring urban centers is challenged with seemingly intractable economics and social problems. The Garde's focus has been to use Art as a creative societal tool, to build collaborations and organizational initiatives with regional-non profits, businesses and educational institutions that ensure access to economically and academically challenged populations.

For example, in an effort to better prepare students for taking the CMT's, "The Passport to Literacy" co-sponsorship with New London Public Schools, The Garde Arts Center and New London Youth Affairs, provides opportunity for all third graders to read at least five books within five weeks, to enhance student performance and engage child and family interaction in reading literacy. Many of these students never have an opportunity to read at home. Student reaching this goal will be rewarded with up to three free passes for themselves and their parent(s)/guardian(s) to see the exciting theatrical event "Free of charge."

The Garde spearheaded the establishment of a county-wide "Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition" which has been recognized, and ultimately, funded by the DECD/Office as a Designated Regional Service Organization.

The Garde staff, board, and volunteers' leadership role in regional collaboration and initiatives has opened its doors by providing office space, program partnerships and production services for numerous local arts and civic organizations, such as;

- exhibit space for local colleges, arts organizations, and social service organizations; showcases for local musicians, 1450-seat movie palace, and as well, provides the performance home for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, Eastern

Connecticut Ballet, Connecticut Lyric Opera, Miss Connecticut Pageant, and numerous dance schools

Honing the synergy of art as a transformative tool, The Garde has sponsored numerous civic organizations events that build bridges of understanding, and promote community involvement in addressing social issues, such as teen violence. Most notably the New London Youth Talent Show which has filled the Garde's 1500 seat Theater for two consecutive years.

The Garde fosters community conversation on issues of racial prejudice, though working with leaders of the African-American community, youth arts groups, Connecticut Landmarks, museums, Mitchell College, schools, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and Hartford's Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble and produce "New London Making History, Moving Forward"

Each year more than 10,000 young people participate in with performances, workshops, and after-school and summer programs, through its Partners: Artists, Community, and Education (PACE) initiative.

In closing, with a staff compliment of seven, and team of 160 dedicated volunteers, The Garde has served over 120,000 constituents, presenting and hosting 400 days of performances, film, civic events, meetings, and rehearsals. With its diverse presenting program of Broadway, dance, opera, symphony orchestra, contemporary music, variety acts, school-time performances and film, the Garde served primarily 63 towns in greater New London County. It is the largest cultural employer in the City and the region, and provides jobs and internships throughout the year for production staff, stage crew, event managers, area students and local artists.

I would like to thank you for your time, attention, and support of The Garde Arts Center, and again ask that you continue the same level of support in the 2014-2015 Biennial Budget.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rosetta E. Jones,
Garde Board Member